

Posthumanities' New Subjectivities: What Contribution from Critical Feminist Posthumanism to the Contemporary Political Philosophical Debate?

Le nuove soggettività delle Posthumanities. Quale contributo del Postumanesimo Critico Femminista al dibattito filosofico politico contemporaneo?

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Abstract. Critical Posthumanism, informed by feminist theory, is reshaping concepts like subjectivity, materiality, and agency. Privileging a post-anthropocentric stance, intersectional politics, and relational ontologies, it is challenging modern Western dualism proposing what this paper addressed as the unveiling of the disjunctive paradigm. This paper paves the way for understanding Critical Posthumanism contributions to political philosophy, especially in deconstructing the individual subject – whether be it the Ipseity, the Subject of knowledge and rights or Anthropos. The paper presents a Topology of the Ruptures as an analysis of the critique of systemic exclusion of the autarchic subject in respect of marginalized alterities. Critical Posthumanist potential to redefine political conflict and representation of alterities is examined through the case of Canada's legal personhood recognition of the Magpie River. This case illustrates how feminist Posthumanities concepts could contribute to enlarge the plethora of subjectivities beyond the classical human subject, and highlights the possibility of expanding the socio-political collective beyond human agency.

Keywords: feminist theory, critical feminist posthumanism, non-human subjectivity, alterity, environmental personhood.

Riassunto. Nel solco della teoria femminista, il postumanesimo critico propone un'epistemologia post-dualista, post-antropocentrica e intersezionale, proponendo nuovi modelli di soggettività, materialità e agency. Il paper analizza criticamente la genealogia di questo pensiero critico attraverso la messa a fuoco del paradigma disgiuntivo del soggetto e presenta una topologia delle rotture per mettere in luce i contributi che il postumanesimo femminista può apportare alla filosofia politica contemporanea. Esaminando il caso del fiume Magpie al quale è stata riconosciuta la personalità giuridica ambientale, infine, si prova a dimostrare come il postumanesimo possa ridefinire soggettività e rappresentazioni politiche oltre l'umano.

Parole chiave: teoria femminista, soggettività non umana, postumanesimo critico, alterità, personalità ambientale.

Feminist humanity must, somehow, both resist representation, resist literal figuration, and still erupt in powerful new tropes, new figures of speech, new turns of historical possibility.

Haraway, *Ecce Homo Ain't (Ar'n't) I A Woman*, 86

1. Posthumanities, Critical Posthumanism and Political Philosophy. Which Tools for Which Concepts?

Critical Posthumanism – especially in its feminist iterations – has gained momentum in contemporary critical and theoretical debates concerning the need to reframe concepts such as subjectivity, materiality, and agency¹. Its development sprung mostly within a wide and long-lasting debate around the so called Posthumanism². Diffused mainly in North America, Posthumanism has often been equated with the success of other “post” terms – from post-modern to post-colonial to post-feminism – with

¹ See some of the most important references: Alaimo, *Exposed*; Badmington, *Posthumanism*; Braidotti *The Posthuman*; Ferrando *Philosophical Posthumanism*; Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*; Marchesini, *Post-human*, among others).

² To move beyond this “volatile” usage, a genealogical disambiguation of the posthuman turn is essential. Posthumanism emerged as part of the broader posthuman turn, establishing itself as a sound cultural, philosophical, and academic framework. On the contrary, following Ferrando in *Philosophical Posthumanism*, the posthuman signifier has been broadly used as an umbrella concept encompassing heterogeneous and often contradictory perspectives and conceptual connotations. Its proliferation across cultural studies, political philosophy, Anglo-American philosophy of technology and gender studies has led to conceptual ambiguity, with divergent positions labeled under the same term. This confusion stems from the indiscriminate use of “posthuman” to describe the evolving notion of humanity amid technological advancements in life sciences, AI, and information sciences. The resulting human model is a techno-body hybrid entity, as stated by Henry “Tecnologie trasformativa”. For a further analysis, see Santoemma, “Posthuman turn.”

which it shares the epistemological premise of overcoming or deconstructing previously assumed categories and paradigms. Although the etiology of the concept is varied and complex, philosophical and Critical Posthumanism address the critique and dismantling of a certain concept of human that dominates the history of modern Western thought and has been established through the omission and marginalization of what has not fallen under a monolithic notion of the human³. In this general rethinking of the human condition, Posthumanism presents a broad spectrum of declinations. Critical Posthumanism (CP)⁴ is the one assumed in this paper, and it lies in a theoretical and political urge to dismantle the historically acquired operationalization of the concept of human as a disjunctive category in the Western world. Its scholarly meaning and theoretical application are to be found in the rise of the flourishing Posthumanities: a strand of critical thinking – that is spreading within the research and academic environment – fostering a transdisciplinary critical thought whose focus lies in the onto-epistemological theorization of the posthuman turn through a substantial critical apparatus for a renewal of the Humanities. Critical Posthumanism, therefore, responds to the need to renew critical theory by problematizing the limits of a certain hegemonic version of the concept of the human/Subject and of positivist, colonial and anthropocentric epistemologies as productive apparatuses of discourses and knowledge derived from them. Following this approach, the paper explores the specific research aims of this monographic issue and seeks to examine, analyze, and demonstrate Posthumanities potential contributions to political philosophy, namely how its analytical grids can reshape common political-philosophical perspectives on key concepts fundamental to the discipline. Having in mind classical topics such as the subject of action and rights, political agency, individuality and titularity of rights, the intertwined dimension of social body, institution and autonomy, conflict and power circulation and so on, the aim is to argue that political philosophy must face today the emerging and disruptive dimension of non-human entities,

³ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* and “Posthuman Critical Theory;” Halberstam and Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies*; Haraway, “The promises of monsters;” Miah, “Posthumanism: A Critical History.”

⁴ Also known as feminist posthumanism or/and New Materialism in some authors. The definition has probably first been given by Braidotti, *The Posthuman*. It differentiates Critical Posthumanism (from now on CP) from Posthumanism as the broad philosophical current of thought. CP is mainly based at the intersection of feminist epistemologies, post-structuralism and post- and decolonial studies. Informed by feminist genealogies, CP is today predominantly disseminated as a theoretical movement of crossing disciplinary boundaries typical of the Humanities. Some of the voices of the feminist CP are, for example, Stacy Alaimo, Cecilia Åsberg, Simone Bignall, Samantha Frost, Diana Coole, Vicky Kirby, María Puig de la Bellacasa, Angela Balzano, Christine Daigle.

agencies and a wide-open subjectivity too. This move is one of political epistemology: it is not a question of fitting into an existing debate, but of widening the discursive inquiry, knowledge making and methodology of the discipline itself. To achieve this broad aim, and without pretension to exhaust the debate, the paper starts posing two key questions: which are the most pressing and relevant themes/concepts emerging from current scholarly literature of Critical Posthumanism? Which instruments could be derived in implementing such new concepts?

The first question will be addressed by highlighting the critical application of the feminist contribution, which has been taken up and progressively developed within the post-dualist and post-anthropocentric framework of Critical Posthumanism. This framework, it is argued, theoretically leads to a reconsideration of the disjunctive paradigm underlying the various forms and interpretations that “the Subject” concept generally assumes within the context of Western hegemonic thought. This transition is of fundamental importance in outlining contributions to the field of political philosophy: indeed, a progressive move away from the Subject as an individual – specifically, its substantial analogy with the liberal individual, the autonomous, rational, and self-contained being as the foundation of rights and political agency – is linked to elements of autarchy that fails to adequately respond to contemporary challenges. One of which is precisely contained in the attempt to answer the second question, which concerns the constituent case – blurred but increasingly prominent in emerging jurisprudence – of the legal personhood of non-human entities.

Critical Posthumanism, drawing from Haraway’s Cyborg Theory, is based on an analytic of power⁵ whereby modern dualisms collapse with the emergence of bodies, existences, forms of life, and horizons of datitude that do not correspond to a human univocal referent – whether it be the Subject of rights and knowledge, of history, or even *Anthropos*.⁶ This rewriting of the limits and boundaries of the subject therefore influences the way itself subjectivities and social body are addressed and therefore presents challenges and connections that political philosophy aims to investigate.⁷ Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to discuss to

⁵ Foucault, *La volontà de savoir*.

⁶ For an account of the feminist posthumanist critique around the notion of *Anthropos* see: Alaimo, *Exposed*; Frost, *Biocultural creatures*; Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*; Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*.

⁷ For this reason and for the sake of this argument, one might follow political philosopher Stefano Petrucciani’s reading of the discipline: “although obviously intertwined with historical processes and political and social conflicts, we do not believe [that political philosophy] is reducible to a mere translation of them on the level of reflection and conceptual elaboration. The specificity of political philosophy consists in the attempt to propose arguments, to construct a warp of reasoning around the questions that social and political coexistence raises.

what extent Critical Posthumanism could bring a renewed discourse into political philosophy, arguing for an epistemological political contribution. The paper discusses how a posthumanist political philosophical terrain involves privileging prismatic subjectivities, intersectional politics, and connections with cutting-edge post-anthropocentric instruments such as the one of non-human legal personhood. Informed through a Topology of the Ruptures the first paragraph tackles the main research question which revolves around the notion of subject/subjectivity hegemonic in Western rationality, and its monolithic autarchic feature. The sub-research question follows this path from the theoretical background to shortly address a “case study” analysis of non-human subjectivation bridging CP to political and law theory.

2. Destroying the Subject: the Cyborg, Alterity or *Many Feet in Many Places*⁸

The first part of this paper proposes a reading of CP as an epistemological framework that can unravel the disjunctive paradigm typical of the Western modernity subject, which works in the process of structurally marginalizing alterities. This claim is not new in the history of feminist and critical thinking: its roots lie in the subversive potential that emerged in varying degrees in the late 20th century. It is detected on a systematic-methodological level by intersectionality⁹ and with an epistemic-political claims by postcolonial, black and decolonial feminist approaches.¹⁰ Such a polyphonic quality, which synchronically characterizes all the marginalized subjectivities,¹¹ finds its epistemic turn and political-philosophical counter-

The aim of political philosophy is to propose good arguments to respond to the challenges, problems, and conflicts that arise in social cooperation”; Petrucciani, *Modelli di filosofia politica*, VII-VIII.

⁸ Gillman, Thomas, “Con un pie a cada lado.”

⁹ See: Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*; Ruiz et al., “Intersectionality Theory.”

¹⁰ See, among others: Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes”; Trinh, Thi Minh-ha, *Women, Native, Others*; Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism.” The positioning of Black and Brown feminism, along with queer and LGBTQ+ subjectivities, in opposition to the dominance of white feminist discourse – as the one adopted in hooks, *Ain't I A Woman?* – as well as the affirmative resurgence of politics of location (Rich, “Notes toward a politics of location”) and marginalized voices, already constitutes a counter-dialectical debate. In this debate, the conflict itself is redefined, shifting from a focus on individual rights to the broader subjectivities that have been historically denied political agency and meaningful representation in the public sphere.

¹¹ The references are here in particular to the thoughts of the margins (an expression coined by bell hooks 1989, among others) that arose within the political claims of heterogeneous groups such as the International Wages for Housework Movement, the Combahee River Collective, the Black Women's Liberation Movement, the STAR movement during the second part

part in the re-proposition of subjectivity as a dissonant, prolific, prismatic, never unitary entity. A perspective that emerged across various marginalized groups within social movements, in response to the shortcomings of white feminism, primarily centered on the political agency of women, affirming their individuality through the recognition of political citizenship in alignment with the democratic tradition. These political demands specifically emphasized the recognition of inalienable rights, the pursuit of happiness and equality, and the fulfillment of human aspirations and values within the liberal tradition. However, they often failed to account for the limitations these claims encounter when confronted with intersecting hierarchies of discrimination and marginalization. Amid the rise of marginal voices and the proliferation of diverse perspectives, a common denominator persists: an antagonism toward political, institutional, epistemic, and hegemonic structures embodied in the universalism of power. The increasing emergence of these multiple voices highlights not only the theme of oppression but also the systematic erasure or annihilation of specificities in favor of a universal framework which suppresses the development of marginal or sub-marginal political agencies, preventing them from fully emerging.

CP¹² grew as a current of thought in this politically imbued debate and has been developing a posthumanist, post-dualist and post-anthropocentric grid of analysis informed by the plurality of intersectional feminisms, eco-feminist and post-structural theories, aiming at critically address their claims as pivotal within a theoretical and epistemological turn too. Therefore, its main critical focus revolves around the un-making of the hegemonic subject via a manifold approach. Introducing the deconstruction of the self-referential subject, whether representative of species or subject of, history, ideas and knowledge, CP provides the epistemological tools to disengage subjectivity from the paradigm of humanist solipsism and the consequent marginalization of dehumanized subjectivities. This process paves the way to a more hybrid, co-constructed, and affirmative reading of the notion of the subject promoting a reshuffling of the load-

of the XX century in USA and further joined by cyberfeminism in West countries and post and decolonial instances from other parts of the world and against the hegemony of canonic concepts and influences of eurocentrism. These instances were then brought into focus by intersectional thinking. Although different in standpoint, the common and intersecting plan is to embrace power, reformulating it, not through the “inclusive agendas” typically inherited from the liberal universalist perspective, but by valuing difference not as detrimental but as a crucial standpoint. Challenging liberal notions of rights, the patriarchal/violent characteristic of free will and individual/subject claims.

¹² See some of the most important contributions: Alaimo, *Exposed*; Åsberg and Braidotti, *A Feminist Companion to the Posthumanities*; Braidotti, *The Posthuman*; *Posthuman Knowledge*; *Posthuman Feminism*; Herbretcher, *Critical Posthumanism*; Haraway, “Manifesto for Cyborgs,” “The promises of monsters,” *Staying with the trouble*.

bearing dichotomies of modernity such as nature-culture, human-nonhuman and subject-alterity.

The post-dualist feature of CP is deeply rooted in feminist philosopher and scientist Donna Haraway's cyborg ontology. When firstly made its appearance, her work was welcomed by several voices recognizing themselves in some of the cyborg interpretative threads, re-signifying and readjusting it to the commensurability of technology's dominance over a hybridized existence. And yet, reading now those pages of *A Cyborg's Manifesto*, it is impossible not to notice their intersectional vocations and their overtures which go far beyond a mere cyberfeminist enthusiasm. Haraway's cyborg constituted a major theoretical vanguard; it represented (and still represents) a theoretical and political laboratory of the collapsing barriers of hypostatized and immobilized recognition thresholds. Destruction of the dichotomies of the Western order of thought – for instance in the famous dualism Haraway's find to be nature-culture, human-animal, organic-inorganic – allowed an in-depth critique of emancipative, essentialist or socialist feminism, which stood on the universal canons of the human subject of history. Blurring this homeostatic and supposedly neutral political subject, letting hybridity enter the space of identity, the cyborg engendered that metaphorical figuration dense with counter-narrative meanings capable of shedding light on racial, technological, sexual, economic and biopolitical devices that are functional to the rising neoliberal form of governance. A feminist posthumanist reappraisal of cyborg ontology translates into a renewed evaluation of the *mestizo* quality¹³ (cyborg, indeed, is a mixture of organic and artefact) that still informs exclusion and marginalization as phenomena which have been protracted by means of those devices.

Today's massive revival of Haraway's work is, in fact, no coincidence. Quoting from one of her early works: "Humanity is a modernist figure; and this humanity has a generic face, a universal shape".¹⁴ Cyborg ontology framework also triggered a series of political-theoretical theorizations aimed at raising the need to ask: who is this univocal referent of Humanity? How to politically assess a hybrid kinship?¹⁵ Naming the *who* is the first step to allow a critical dismantling of the monolithic version of the human/Anthropos concept, in order not to dissipate the subject completely, rather to restore a more informed picture and theorization of the swarming reality of the emergence of political subjectivity. One opened to the process of co-construction, intersection and continuous hybridiza-

¹³ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

¹⁴ Haraway, "The promises of monsters," 86.

¹⁵ Henry, "La parentela fra le specie."

tion with ecosystemic, non-human, techno-hybrid and teratological othernesses. The philosophical-political relevance of the epistemic operation of dismantling the classic notion of autonomies relating to humans shows how humanity's notion itself became stale and is no longer able to represent the dynamic plurality that inhabits and passes through human and non-human collectives. Human and Humanism are constantly deprived of fixed attributes already by post and decolonial thought, by techno and digital apparatus and by a progressive cyborgization of life forms, where *natureculture* osmosis co-build shared spaces. In the perspective of the epistemic rupture, CP envisions a human concept acting by emanation, and at the same time, operates to deconstruct it from its fixist attributes. A preminent destabilization of human self-centered focus is placed under the critical lens of analyses that detect its limits in the following claims: those of universality, neutrality, those that associate enlightenment and rationality, but also those that placed humans in an utter isomorphism with the natural as a mere reproduction of itself and with the perfect measure that it represents.

2.1 *Topology of the Ruptures*

Among many feminist posthumanist scholars theorizing this shift, the onto-epistemological proposal of philosopher and physicist Karen Barad perfectly describes the ontological rift of the human from the rest of the world, through the construction of a whole series of representative, discursive and symbolic apparatuses which, although functional to human/humanist modes of knowledge, have ended up keeping out everything that is not human, especially matter. This has generated a separatist ontology, that led to what the paper proposes to address as a disjunctive paradigm. Closed in a sort of individualist metaphysics, human is: "a distinct individual, the unit of all measure, finitude made flesh: his separateness is the key".¹⁶ Against this backdrop though, a posthumanist subjectivity must not pass through the diasporic stigma of the de-humanized. On the contrary, it already populates an enmeshed horizon of prismatic affirmation where dichotomies of exclusion/inclusion are put under a critical lens. CP makes this transition through a process of epistemic rupture with respect to which it originates a process of "dis-identification" of the subject both on an onto-epistemological as well as a political philosophical level. As Nina Lykke affirmed recalling Judith Butler's work, indeed "the act of disidentification is prompted by the unease produced by intersecting sets of power differen-

¹⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 134.

tials which the unifying signifier glosses over".¹⁷ Identity's disruption does not fail once more within a universalizing flat stance, annihilating the power of specific situated identity; rather it focuses on those self-referential categories that produced the propelling center of knowledge, power relations, social and discursive relations, symbolic myths and, as accounted more recently, that massive anthropic effect of consumption of earth a resources reservoir.¹⁸ The subject CP theories are tackling at a theoretical level is what here can be addressed as a *hu/man*: a human who stands as a representative of humankind, who is masculine in forces of semantics and representations and who falls under the "Man" construct, that is "transcendental empirical allotrope"¹⁹ at work in Western thought, acting on several levels (practical and discursive) a structural oppressive disjunctive paradigm.

This paper individuates at least three characters around which CP epistemic rupture occurs and can be summed up in the following topology of the rupture whereby three levels of critique conflate in a move of dismantling the autarchic feature of the subject that can be re-appraised as crucial in contemporary political philosophy.

Topology of the Ruptures

HUMAN/HUMANISM PRINCIPLES INHERITED BY WESTERN MODERNITY/POSITIVISM	NAMING THE 'WHO' POSTHUMANIST FEMINIST RUPTURES
1. Ontological Hygiene [the One far from the Other]	a. Difference at work b. [having a voice, heuristic scope of feminism for the <i>other</i>]
2. Subject of Knowledge/Reason [Western, modern reason, truth making]	b. Situating Knowledge Production [re-shuffling discretion into the onto-epistemological perspective gaze]
3. Anthropos [anthropocentrism as a paradigm]	c. Alterities [In/appropriability/transpeciesism]

Firstly, the ontological hygiene of the One. Namely the unique, homeostatic, legit subject who stands as the aseptic uncontested recognition of a superior human that banishes differences acting inside a solipsistic ontology. The very first rupture inaugurated by CP literature has its most profound roots in feminism of difference, in particular in the philosophical production of difference feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. Following the

¹⁷ Lykke, "Passionately Posthuman," 24.

¹⁸ Alaimo, *Exposed*, 143-68.

¹⁹ See Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses*.

publication of *Speculum of the Other Woman*²⁰ Irigaray addressed the problem of the Mimetic Subject, le *Même*, the Identical-self relating to the concept of Ipseity as a unique form of representation of the realm and center to which phenomena are given. On a theoretical level, the facets of this human/subject are built on a solipsistic ontology, a self-referential mode of representation in which ipseity is the prominent characteristic of its being in the world, its attributes, and its relationality with external forms of life. This subject/One – at least until late modernity Marxian or Nietzschean philosophy, that untangles the “I” with consciousness – coincides with the “I” (or an *Ego*) and operates its identification through the exclusion of the other (the non-I) via a negative, disjunctive affirmation of the self. Everything that falls under the “realm” of the non-subject, the “non-I”, acts as a counterbalance to give the subject cogency, foundations and reality. The foundational, identitarian and absolute Subject in Western philosophical tradition and the ‘I’ in modern psychoanalysis promote a concept of the Self residing in its own negative essence: human nature, the essence of man, the recognition of the “I” only occurs and can only occur through the negation of that which is not human essence. Of course, this “I” coincides with the heritage of the Cartesian tradition, travelling on a dualist ontology in which everything opposed to the *cogito* is, therefore, a counter (negative) balance. Consequently, modern thought has posited this subject as coinciding with the human, be it the spirit, the One, consciousness, the subject of knowledge or the subject of history. Its universalist drive tends to equate the masculine viewpoint with that of the generalist construct of the human, confining all other subjectivities – and the feminine, the focus of Irigaray’s philosophy – as structurally Other. The feminist philosophy of difference reveals that this other-than-the-subject is indeed a sexed, feminine subject and that the One/Identical subject is, in turn, the masculine that counts the sexualized other human/woman as its radical alterity, a difference occupying the categories of the corruptible, the outside “other”. CP inherits and enlarges these reflections, pointing out how this “I” is adamantly a *hu/man*: it is masculine sexed and standardized, but also no animal is a subject, nor each kind of non-conforming alterity. The theme of the prismatic difference is as it has been explained so far, a basic marginalization theorem but also the mark of affirmation of dissonant, scattered and uncanny subjectivities. The valorization of otherness as a non-deteriorating difference is therefore re-appraised in CP epistemological operation of criti-

²⁰ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (the original French version was published in 1975). See also Irigaray L., *Égales à qui?*. Irigaray develops her analysis beginning from the psychoanalytic tradition in which ‘woman’ is a sexed, marked form of human: woman lacks the plenitude of her counterpart man; she experiences – and engenders – the vacuum that always yearns.

cal deconstruction of the hierarchies posed not only by the I/subject and its Identity recognition but by the human subject/solipsistic move too. Drawing on the work of bell hooks and Trinh T. Minh-ha²¹, CP attempt is to reframe the ontological hygiene unravelling its strong power-loaded functioning by affirming that the woman – and any kind of odd alterity – is denied the *logos* precisely because she, as the passive matter/nature/mere counterweight of the human male, has no voice; she cannot express words, above all when she/it/he (to queer difference feminism) is a marginalized, racialized, and de-humanized alter. Posthumanist categories of difference become the monstrosities, native subjectivities, queer subjects and scattered and dissipated non-hu/man engendering affirmatively the substrate of discrimination against the idea of negative-minoritarian subjectivities whose voices have been silenced. Irigaray critique of phallogocentrism is, in fact, as Braidotti often reiterates in her posthuman theory, a *phallogocentrism*:

In the political economy of phallogocentrism anthropocentric humanism, which predicates the sovereignty of Sameness in a falsely universalistic mode, my sex fell on the side of 'Otherness', understood as a pejorative difference, or as being-worth-less-than. The becoming-posthuman speaks to my feminist self, partly because my sex, historically speaking, never quite made it into full humanity, so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted²².

The fundamental deprivation experienced by the "other" in relation to the identical human is the subtraction of *logos*. This absence results in a lack of political agency and, consequently, the inability to engage in ethical-discursive practices, ultimately rendering the "other" incapable of "speaking" within public, cultural, and social spaces. This realization – marked by a rupture – reveals how within the feminism of difference, particularly in European feminist movements and thought of the 1970s, the 'other' is already de-subjectivized. The hypostatized subject described by Irigaray, along with the rupture she seeks to enact by exposing its solipsistic limitations, is none other than the subject whose exercise of symbolic, epistemic, and political violence is today updated and critically examined through a posthumanist lens. The predominance of the *Même* over multiplicity, a foundational principle of Western thought, has historically led theorists to conceptualize the feminine only in terms of absence, a non-place, or a mere subtraction from the so-called "neutral" masculine²³.

²¹ hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness;" Trinh, Thi Minh-ha, *Women, Native, Others*.

²² Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 80.

²³ See Giardini, "La venire della differenza."

Such epistemic solipsism catches on the side of further epistemological situated analysis, deepened by the CP, that lead us to the second level of rupture, whereby universality and transcendence of the subject of knowledge/reason have made him representative of a unique rationality. Once more, the counterbalance of non-canonical or marginalized histories, cultures, experiments and knowledge are cast out from the scientific and cultural legitimacy as well as from the discursive-representational process of knowledge-making within the collective imaginary. CP second path of critique thus concerns the construction of rationality and reason, as well as the formation of knowledge, which refers to those dictates of measurability of reality and a purportedly neutral objectivity that epistemology and STS already brought into focus. Following the idea of the non-neutral and, indeed, specifically power-exerting construction of the *Man of Reason* developed in the same titled book by Genevieve Lloyd, this broad debate – expanded and situated within feminist political epistemology²⁴ – can be variously traced in the works of several CP scholars.²⁵ It constitutes both a methodological critique through the promotion of knowledge models that distance themselves from rationality as a canon – such as non-Western, decolonial, and Indigenous models (Hoppers 2021), where the decentralization of the knowing subject is crucial – and a key theme in epistemological and political discussions. One of the central debates concerns the hierarchical separation between the knowing subject and the known, mostly inert object, a structural feature of both scientific positivism and its determinism, as well as Kantian gnosology and later embedded in the neopositivist attitude. CP debates are seeking to point to the exclusion performed by “reason” that can be found from period to period and culture to culture, extended to non-conforming beings often relegated to the sphere of instincts and nature by the violent *hu/man* horizon of knowledge. Feminist affirmed critiques of reason-nature opposition, such as the one adopted by early ecofeminist theorist Val Plumwood, are re-elaborated. They move from the need to unveil the presumed neutrality of this universal human/subject of knowledge/reason to the situated knowledges perspectives for which the individual entitled to such reason has always been non-neutral, surreptitiously including values and social qualities associated with masculinity/human hegemony and, above all, its equation with the holding of absolute truth. The link between *hu/man* and reason is embodied in a kind of creature engendering the fundamental ideas of our culture, one that does not leave space

²⁴ For a more in-depth analysis see: Balzano and Santoemma, “Lines of Flights.”

²⁵ See: Balzano, *Eva Virale*; Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*; Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman*.

for a second form of truth: non-human animals, like women and under-represented cultures could not have their own truth because their truth is always subordinated and relativized through its original and detrimental link to nature and matter, that “with their overtones of femaleness, is seen as something to be transcended”.²⁶ Claire Colebrook’s work²⁷ for instance adapts a discontinuous but nonetheless centralizing reading of the human by viewing pre-modernity as a site for the consolidation of human superiority within the animal kingdom (hu/man as *rational animal*) but provided with deliberative reason and imagination; in what we call ‘modernity’, she suggests, human beings were disengaged from worldliness of any kind to instead represent pure reason.²⁸ On the one hand, there is a being known as human insofar as there is a way of synthesizing and organizing reality; on the other, the world itself only exists because there is a subject who can know it. The subject of knowledge and its centrality converges in the political and juridical, moral and normative levels in the subject as holder of rights and freedom in the Enlightenment’s emancipationist drive: reason is what determines the *hu/man*, a reason informs the morality its actions, and finally, knowing and acting according to inner moral law accompany the subject of knowledge along its teleological oriented path. The fulfilment of this anthropocentric gnoseology appears in Kant’s transcendental subject. The famous gnoseological Copernican revolution, which has widely influenced modern reflections on the subject, seizes the object/phenomenon only in relation to the subject’s specific capacity to perceive (through the spatial-temporal determination of perception and image) or corresponding to noumenal unknowability. Revolving entirely around the subject Kantian modern inheritance generates an *a priori* universalizing objectivity of the *given* (given or datum to us humans and not in itself), proper to the human being; on the other hand, it results in the impossibility of restoring ontological independence to the external, natural world and datum. The element of givenness that, in the genealogies of feminist and posthumanist political epistemology, far from being an external and natural figure, is instead already and always, not a discrete *res extensa* or mere spatiality, but an emerging entity of relational co-construction that possesses agency. It is subject-object, human-nonhuman, land-soil, animal-plants, organic-nonorganic enmeshing. Together with the load-bearing dualisms of modernity (human-animal, man-woman, mind-body, colonial-colonized), the barriers of the hegemonic knowledge subject thus collapse,

²⁶ Lloyd, *Man of Reason*, 5.

²⁷ Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman*, 19-37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 98-110.

and the complex *naturematter* becomes the exuberant and agency-bearing figure along with marginalized subjectivities.

The critical reflection on the separation as discrete entities between the human/subject and the external *datum*, leads to the third and last critical rupture. It consists in the application of the problematic feature of the disjunctive paradigm via the speciesist character of Anthropos. Being the representative of human species, Anthropos as a concept served for CP the idea of a biological individual starring in those processes believed to have forged humanity as a symptom of speciation that has had “vertical” outcomes.²⁹ Feminist posthumanist critiques, which are post-anthropocentric and antispeciesist – play a crucial role emphasizing material-semiotic and intra-active transspecies kinship existing not only among different living beings, but as a relational agential realism among materiality and things. One of the cutting-edge turns of New Materialism version of CP³⁰ indeed revolves around the agentivity of matter: namely, a recognition of a processual, non-teleological or voluntarist form of agency immanent to matter, materiality and their relational entanglement³¹. While agency is extended to more-than-human entanglements as a capacity to act, affect and be affected/be acted in-within³² feminist posthumanist literature, which challenges mastery over nature and human exceptionalism, contributes significantly to Anthropocene studies by assuming an intersectional visual dynamic according to which “the Anthropocene suggests that agency must be rethought in terms of interconnected entanglements rather than as a unilateral ‘authoring of actions’”.³³ The revolution of thought in posthumanist terms brings face to face with questions that challenge our apparatuses of representation and semiotic formulation of the Anthropos human animal as an immense reservoir of brutal and abstract force. Anthropos is thus not a category in itself, rather it is an epistemic apparatus that keeps us from better understanding the intricate ecosystems of non-discrete relationships among the most disparate entities never atomized from the natural-cultural tangles of which it is a part.³⁴ In this respect, the ethological contribution in CP also plays a fundamental role, which has variously highlighted how in the process of evolution of what we call Anthropos or the human, a re-consideration of everything that is-not-human not as just a thing or an instrument, a lever for our own survival or only an animal prey is to be considered. The story of Anthropos is

²⁹ See Marchesini, *Post-human*.

³⁰ A complete account is given by Coole and Frost, *New Materialism*.

³¹ For the concept of new materialist entanglement see: Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

³² *Ibid.*, 353-70.

³³ Alaimo, *Exposed*, 156.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

one of continuous making-with alterity as partners that informs a fundamental hybridative process. To grasp this posthumanist shift in considering the idea undergoing the representative of species, Roberto Marchesini discusses its specificity as made in the fullness of exchanges and not in a sort of ontological lack. A human being who is among the most willing to exchange with otherness, not only to compensate its shortcomings but rather precisely because possessing a phylogenetic make-up that disposes it extensively to the relationship with otherness.³⁵ Against this backdrop, CP theory also warns against considering this hybrid, relational sphere as infinitely permeable, so much so that the promise of these othernesses, despite centuries of marginalization, is to retain a figure of in/appropriability³⁶, a subversive never submitted agency, overflowing from the margins. Once this analysis of the topology of ruptures and the claiming character of the emergence of a new proliferation of subjectivities is presented, one can then wield the CP's innovative toolkit for political philosophy to think about the enlargement of the plethora of subjectivities. One for instance, emerging through new materialities and agencies for a better accounting of non-human subjectivity in search for rights and protection not from outside, but in the midst of the political collectivity. An attempt is made, without claiming to exhaust the debate but with the aim of demonstrating the possible open contributions between CP and current challenges in political philosophy, to discuss this brief case of application in the following concluding paragraph.

3. Conclusion: the Magpie River and Non-Human Subject Personhood

Having discussed how CP could detect discrimination and marginalization dispositives that act in certain "all-too-humanized" social forms, this conclusive part of the paper seeks to introduce the novelty that a post-humanist political epistemology could bring into some dynamics of nowadays most urgent issues of political conflict and representation. In the topology of the ruptures inaugurated by feminist CP, it emerges the necessary redefinition of "the subject" concept and its attributes, towards that of a prismatic, relational, co-constructed subjectivity. This subjectivity is first and foremost non-autarchic, with diverse and diffracted cognitive-material

³⁵ See Marchesini, *Beyond Anthropocentrism*. Many studies contribute to the debate of diversity incorporated thanks to the processes of actualization and the threshold shifts of living beings and their bio-evolutionary processes. This is the most debated feature emerging from post-Darwinist thought, against behavioral tradition/expressions linked to the genetic determinist view. See for instance the famous Kauffman, *At Home in the Universe*.

³⁶ See Haraway, "The promises of monsters."

boundaries. It is a subjectivity that emerges as specific but is relationally open. It is both an ontological givenness and epistemic construct that does not keep out the non-standard one (be it marginalized human subjectivity, or non-human animal and beyond). It is agency-bearing in the sense of being a potential vector of change beyond the teleological model and not just a blank sheet of external impacts. Having in mind this backdrop, a question remains: it is possible to discuss the possibility to enlarge the plethora of subjectivities participating in the socio-political collective of humans and nonhumans together? The argument here refers to a specific case study mostly discussed in law theory, but more and more crucial to political theory and international relations research³⁷: the recognition of legal personhood of non-human subjects³⁸.

Many are the examples of what is today called environmental or juridic personhood³⁹ at present times. The formulas granting non-humans rights in this field are often specific, and relate from time to time to different legal systems, constitutional recognitions, acknowledgement of the status of legal person to entities such as corporations, AI, ecosystems, communities, or some new 'subjects of law' whose case can be found and accounted as in what we might approximate as non-human subjectivity: such as rivers, lakes, seas, mountain ranges⁴⁰. These entities are recognized in different ways. There are some cases in which non-human enti-

³⁷ Cudworth et al., *Posthuman Dialogues in International Relations*.

³⁸ The topic is vast and this paper, for reasons of space and structure, only opens to the proposed scientific reflection, namely the possible contribution of feminist posthumanism to the urgent issues of political philosophy and today's challenges. The theme of environmental personhood is of specific interest to the author, who is devoting an in-depth separate research to the study of the posthumanist or anthropocentric aspects of non-humans legal personality and of the specificities (or *facti species*) that these phenomenon addresses, and also of the properly political and not only legal dimension that the recognition of the non-human in the corresponding legal and constitutional models poses today. The author greets both reviewers for their suggestions.

³⁹ Foundational works on juridic personhood are. Dewey "Corporate Legal Personality;" Ferrara *Le persone giuridiche*; Stone "Should Trees Have Standing?"; as for today non-human legal subjects see da Cunha "'Culture' and Culture;" Boyd, *The rights of nature*; O'Donnell and Jones "Creating Legal Rights for Rivers;" Míguez Núñez, *Le avventure del soggetto*; Morrow, "Land System Change." For a closer account of a posthumanist subjectivity see: Luisetti, *Nonhuman Subjects*.

⁴⁰ To be quoted for instance: Ecuador's Constitution (2008): Recognizes the rights of nature (Pachamama) to exist and regenerate; Community Legal Personhood, Pennsylvania Community Bill of Rights Ordinance, Grant Township, Indiana County, (2014): see the draft in the References list; Río Atrato in Colombia, (2016): in which the country's Constitutional Court recognized the Atrato River as a legal subject; Whanganui River, New Zealand (2017): First river granted legal personhood under New Zealand law; Ganges and Yamuna Rivers, India (2017, later overturned): initially recognized as legal persons but later revoked by India's Supreme Court.

ties are not granted a clear-cut legal subject but are recognized as a sort of subjectivity/entity by regional administrative regulatory body or other representative bodies, so that councils can be advocated on their behalf⁴¹. Other cases, passing through the legal personhood, account such non-human entities for being entitled of rights and responsibilities like those of humans. This status allows them to own property, enter contracts, sue or be sued, and be held accountable under the law that in these forms exists to protect collective interests, ensure accountability, and promote ethical considerations. But while corporations are granted legal personhood to facilitate business operations, environmental entities like rivers or forests are sometimes granted rights to safeguard ecosystems from exploitation. Environmental personhoods/subjectivities, therefore, represent a specificity. This specific strand of cases indeed exists as a result of debates concerning the enormous anthropogenic impact on ecosystems, land consumption, massive pollution of soil, air and groundwater, and forced extractivism, which led to the formulation of the environmental protection concept of *ecocide*. Their various and horizontal assessment sprung from the need of safeguards and protection that, more than just posing non-interference principles with their added and newest interests (such as the case of corporations), ensure their thriving, which in turn is entangled with other subjectivities, humans included.

An interesting case to be discussed in conclusion for the aim of this paper is given by the Canadian State to the Quebec Magpie River⁴² or Muteshekau-Shipu (the Innu name for the river) is a 300-kilometer-long waterway that is particularly important to the indigenous Innu people of the First Nations. For centuries it has been the main waterway in the area, a source of food and natural encounters for native populations inhabiting the lands along its course. In recent years, the development of a hydroelectric dam has threatened the river. Clean energy sustainability has proved to be a fallacious narrative in this case, showing that it is insufficient to improve the policies relating to only one aspect of that immersive co-construction intricacy that characterizes ecosystems. This case is interesting to discuss the CP contributions in political philosophy because the strug-

⁴¹ This is the case of Australia, where the Victoria State recognizes the Birrarung/Yarra River as "one living, natural entity" (without legal personhood) and established the Birrarung Council to advocate for it (Yarra River Protection Act 2017) or the Martuwarra Fitzroy Council in western Australia, that acknowledges the Martuwarra/Fitzroy River as a living being with a "right to life," though this is not yet state-recognized. See Poelina et al. "Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council".

⁴² On this specific case see: Kramm, "When a River Becomes a Person;" Stavridis, "Municipal Levels Reconciliation." There is a vast literature and several case studies on the recognition of rivers and watercourses exist. See: Ekstein et al., "Conferring Legal Personality on the World's Rivers" and Clark et al. "Can You Hear the Rivers Sing."

gles and claims for the river to be granted legal personhood came from a form of constituent assembly composed of different subjectivities experiencing different types of margins. Indigenous peoples, active citizenship, and local entities of different backgrounds and types have formed the Alliance for Protection of the Magpie River and Muteshekau-Shipu. The watercourse has been guaranteed legal personhood through the adoption of two parallel resolutions by the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit and Minganie Regional County Municipality. The resolutions assign potential legal guardians responsible for protecting it as well as nine rights following in the tradition of humanitarian and human rights legislation but readapted here in the spirit of environmental justice, such as: “le droit de vivre, d’exister et de couler”, “le droit à la régénération et à la restauration”, “le droit d’ester en justice”⁴³.

Even though this move exposes to the risk of anthropomorphizing of non-human subjectivities, it must be recalled that this and other cases are presenting entities that transcend the traditional subject-person equation and thus elude identification and consequent inclusion in the system and jurisdiction with a definitory framework. Following a posthumanist critique, this in/appropriable figure also extends to the question of the political subject in a twofold manner. This is at the same time the investigation around the expansion of the subject of actions/expression of norms (social and legal, cultural and ethical) and the object of interest of political theory and philosophy in a renewed form, which questions the possibility of the emergence of a new political meta-subject, with specificities beyond those of human agency. As for today, the normative-juridistic question rests on an opposition that contemplates the paradigm of “the role of the thing as the instrument of the legal person”⁴⁴ whether empty entity or human, offering a hierarchical relationship between them. For this reason, in order to overcome this long-standing problem, a political theory/philosophy of new subjectivities informed by CP cartographies should look at the emergence of the non-human as an entity/subjectivity displaying agentivity, capability, and responsibility⁴⁵ in a more crowded collective horizon and broader political arena in which the intermingling is no longer, or not only, human.

Muteshekau-Shipu’s legal personhood recognition presents us with the dilemma of assuming a situated perspective. For the Innu indigenous peoples, for non-human animals, lands, soils who inhabit and traverse

⁴³ See the resolution signed by the Conseil des Innu De Ekuanitshit: <http://files.harmony-withnatureun.org/uploads/upload1072.pdf> (last access: 19.07.2025) and the one from Municipalité Régionale de Comté de Mingaine, Province de Québec: <http://files.harmonywithnatureun.org/uploads/upload1069.pdf> (last access: 19.07.2025).

⁴⁴ Núñez, *Le avventure del soggetto*, 23.

⁴⁵ The reference is to the concept developed by Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

those rivers, as well as plant alterities and myriads of ecosystems and atmospheric entities that the river materializes (and which do not only traverse it as an inert substratum), legal protection has undoubted benefits⁴⁶. Although the instrument of legal personality has been interpreted as a dispositive capable of engulfing subversive instances and an instrument of governmental processes, i.e. capable of rendering non-human subjects' persons and thus governable subjectivities⁴⁷, the posthumanist reading offers a different lens than the mere governmental or reticular application of power. To brief assess this argument, firstly, it should be noted that against the risk of anthropomorphizing a non-human entity, the ontological substance of the river is not altered by the use of the legal instrument alone. If anything, it is the legal instrument that approaches the ontological relationality of human and non-human entanglements. The deconstructive lens guaranteed by the topology of rupture – i.e. looking at subjectivity not as autarchic but as an emergence of relational ontology – allows for the recognition of entities other than the humans without depriving of agency and self-determination human indigenous communities and their perspective of horizontal continuity with ecosystems. Passing through the legal tool/device can be problematic of course, but also a 'crack' into the anthropocentric Western system towards a more immanent relationality.

While agreeing on the need not to give in to binary processes of inclusion/exclusion whereby entities exist with/or the rest outside the person dispositive⁴⁸ hegemonic recognition, a posthumanist subjectivity driven personhood is not a value that only refers to models of adaptation and standards, but one questioning the need to re-assess a speciesist, anthropo-suprematist, dualist feature of politics. Indeed, it is true that the political activism, collectivization and transversal movement arising around the Magpie River/Muteshekau-Shipu cannot escape forms of anthropomorphizing in the way the struggle is politically socialized. Politics *is* anthropo-made and anthropo-based. Still, revising the above exposed topology of the ruptures, it is a matter of modifying politics towards more just and non-dualist and exclusionary horizons and thus, reformulating through

⁴⁶ This case, like many others, opens the age-old question that finds many causes of ecological or environmental activism facing the need to plead causes for non-human interests in taking part in purely human political processes. Against the concrete risk of anthropomorphizing the debate, as well as referring to further studies that the author is conducting *in fieri*, we also refer to Eva Haifa Giraud's work *What Comes After Entanglement?*, which explores how to implement political actions and practices without reinforcing anthropocentrism, in a horizon of reflection that account of horizontal entanglements and emergences.

⁴⁷ See: Reeves and Peters, "Responding to Anthropocentrism."

⁴⁸ See Esposito *Third Person*.

those same topologies that idea of the subject towards a new paradigm different from the dominant one. Once more, it is therefore not an invitation to “immanentizing the river” or reframe its ontological status – a gesture that is, moreover, merely theoretical and lacking in any verification of the material, socio-economic and historical processes. It is rather a new pathway of knowledge/epistemology making and ethical-practices exercise through which those myriads of entities that makes up the “river ecosystem” subjectivity is accounted for. It is a matter of recognizing their agency – and not letting them-in in a standardized subject dimension, because they already exist and always have – in the process of emergence of the political collectivity as peculiar non-human actors/agencies.

Magpie River/Muteshekau-Shipu demand for personhood was the fruit of one of the many intense political struggles that indigenous peoples are waging, emerging as a new political subjectivity never detached and rather entangled with their territories. This specific case apart from the lens of legal protection, should be considered in light of a political philosophy account of CP contribution as a contemporary figuration of what is called *zoe-geo-mediated subjectivity* and its specific posthumanist vulnerability.⁴⁹ Mutuhekau Shipu is to be found in the interstices of this assemblage where non-human life, technological entanglements (be they the cultural artifices of jurisprudence or the production of hydroelectric power), and the political claims of geo/local struggles meet up. Considering Mutuhekau Shipu with a posthumanist subjectivity would represent a provocative proposal for meeting new theoretical-political challenges. Specifically, such a subjectivity involves the intermingling of agencies and effect on Earth and the *Earthbound*⁵⁰ traversed by technologies, be they those of legal protection or the industrial creation of energy. It is not single-sided but rather a prismatic, hybrid symbol of political struggle and non-human agentivity impact.

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⁴⁹ Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism*; Daigle, *Posthumanist Vulnerability*.

⁵⁰ This term is the English translation coined by Haraway in *Staying with the trouble*, of Bruno Latour's concept of *Terriens* subjectivities bound and reliant on Earth's (Gaïa) agency. See: Latour, “Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene.”

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